

WallacesFarmer®

ISU SURVEY: CASH RENT FALLS
FOR 4TH YEAR IN A ROW 4

SEED COVER CROP AFTER
SMALL-GRAIN HARVEST 16

SPRAYING 'TIPS' FOR BETTER
WEED CONTROL 18

Powered by Penton® Ag™

Cultivating your investment

BY ROD SWOBODA

THE TRADITIONAL WAY a landlord rents farmland has changed from solely managing the lease and charging rent. A successful rental arrangement today requires greater communication between landlord and farm operator.

Sharing the risk of farming in years of low or no profitability, the rewards in better years, and the stewardship to take better care of the land is now part of a landowner's list of concerns.

Real estate agent Mark Gannon saw these changes coming in 2008 when he established U.S. Farm Lease, a consulting firm working with landlords and tenants to help them reach "a fair cash rent" for both parties. The name was changed to Farmland Stewardship Solutions two years ago, focusing on the total package.

"We make landowners aware of the three most important aspects of owning land: the economic, agronomic and environmental stewardship responsibilities," says Andy Mullan, a farm leasing specialist with FSS. "That's how we analyze each farm for our clients. We make



COMMUNICATE: Andy Mullan (left) and Greg Townsend (right) consult with client Bret Pierce, who farms with his family near Woodward. Pierce keeps in close touch with landlords, letting them know what's happening on their land.

them aware of what's going on in all three areas and help improve the situation, so the farm is managed the best possible way."

This involves gathering and analyzing data — yield, soil fertility, soil erosion and more. "The older tenants tend to be apprehensive; they've never used a data analysis system to look at

the land they farm," says Gannon. "But if the owner values it, the tenant will support it. We have a lot of farm operators who welcome this analysis."

NEED TO SHARE INFORMATION

These tenants are sharing their yield data and other production information with their land-

lords, because "they realize we can analyze it and help them," says Mullan. Also, more farm operators want to use a flexible cash lease to share the financial risk with the landlord, and yield and production information is needed for this type of lease.

Soil fertility, drainage and other management may need to

be improved so the value is in the production. Some areas of a farm may not be naturally productive or are so environmentally fragile that they may be better off in the Conservation Reserve Program or a wetlands program than intensively farmed with row crops.

FSS uses the Agren Soil Calculator to analyze soil erosion and recommend conservation practices. After plugging in various crop rotations, tillage systems and conservation practices, the tool predicts the resulting erosion. Farmers and landlords can evaluate alternatives side by side to maximize profit, conserve soil, preserve yield and reduce inputs.

Greg Townsend, an agronomist who heads FSS, adds: "Two of our goals are to make sure the farm is well-maintained on fertility and that we have precise information on yields, so we can document the present situation, then work to make it better. Many rented farms need to get on a better path of open communication so the owner can know the farm is performing the best it can. That's where we can help."

■ For more, turn to Page 5.

Conference to focus on being better landowner

BY ROD SWOBODA

REGISTRATION IS OPEN for a conference focused on landowners and soil stewardship July 27 at Drake University in Des Moines. Sustaining Our Iowa Land (SOIL) 2017 is a full day of information targeted for landowners, especially non-operators.

The goal of SOIL 2017 is for landowners to develop a better lease for their land — one that's environmentally responsible, is economically sound and protects the land for the future. Landowners attending can learn how conservation and sustainable farming practices are compatible with modern farm production and profitable for both landowner and tenant.

"This is a unique program and opportunity for landowners across the Midwest to come together and discuss topics relevant to them as caretakers to a million-dollar-plus investment in many cases," says Greg Townsend, executive director of Farmland Stewardship Solutions, a SOIL sponsor.

"Owning farmland in today's environment is complex. It's not that you need to be an expert in all areas, but it is important that you stay current of issues affecting farmland owners," he says. "This is an ideal venue to discover information on every aspect of owning, managing, investing and passing on to the next generation healthy, sustainable farmland. This gives participants the chance to learn from experts as well as networking with other landowners."



▲ **FIELDING QUESTIONS:** Bret Pierce (left) and Andy Mullan say more landlords are interested in environmental stewardship and how their land is being farmed.

Speakers for the conference come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Topics they will cover include the landowner's role in stewardship, conservation and the economics working together, the power of on-farm data, systematic and sustainable leasing, the farm as an ecosystem, open communications with tenants, soil health on the farm, the cost of mismanaging soil, navigating land improvement



programs, land trusts, conservation decisions on rented land, and preservation of the family's heritage.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Rounding out the conference will be a landowner and a farmer panel discussion addressing topics such as how to develop a lasting partnership, ways of keeping the landowner informed on what's happening on the farm, and how to discuss conservation practices and the economic returns impacting both parties. Both panels will take questions from the audience.

This conference is sponsored by Drake University Ag Law Center, Farmland Stewardship Solutions, the Iowa Water Center, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and The Nature Conservancy.

It will be July 27 at Drake's Olmstead Center starting at 8 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. Cost is \$75 per person or \$100 per couple. Register at drakeaglaw.org or farmlandstewards.com, or call 515-243-9352.

◀ **PUTTING DATA TO WORK:** Greg Townsend (left) shares his analysis of a piece of land farmed by Bret Pierce near Woodward in central Iowa.

Volume 142 | Number 6

Contents

NewsWatch	1
Opinion	13
Crops	14
Technology/Machinery.....	18
Conservation	23
Farm Management.....	24
Livestock.....	28
Marketplace	31
Country Life.....	40
Marketing.....	41

Contact Us

Editor: Rod Swoboda, 515-505-1550, rod.swoboda@penton.com, 6200 Aurora Ave., Suite 203E, Urbandale, IA 50322

Contributing Editors: Tom J. Bechman, Bryce Knorr, Alan Newport and Fran O'Leary

Senior Editor: Holly Spangler, 309-926-6082, holly.spangler@penton.com

Executive Director, Content and User Engagement: Willie Vogt, willie.vogt@penton.com, 651-454-6994

Sales: Susie Decker, 319-377-3080

Subscriptions: Call 800-441-1410 or email usercontent@penton.com. For additional sales and company information, see the last page of the Marketplace or Classifieds section.

Postmaster: Please send address corrections to Wallaces Farmer, 255 38th Ave., Suite P, St. Charles, IL 60174-5410

Penton is an Informa business.

Assistance for non-operating landowners

Until recently, if you owned farmland and rented it out, you had two options: hiring a farm management company or supervising your rented land on your own. Some landowners aren't ready or may not want to hire a farm manager, but they need help figuring out what is an appropriate rent for their property.

"This can be done if you know all the information available on the land, to make sure your farm is as productive as possible and also operated in a sustainable conservation-minded system. This is our niche," says Greg Townsend, of Farmland Stewardship Solutions, based in Des Moines.

FSS President Mark Gannon established a farm leasing division of Gannon Real Estate in 2008, known as U.S. Farm Lease. The name was changed to Farmland Stewardship Solutions two years ago to focus on managing

data generated by farming operations. "We support the lease and stewardship goals of clients — both landlords and tenants," he says.

With the amount of on-farm data that can be collected with satellites, aerial imaging and other ways, "we can now verify the production practices, yields, fertility, and oversee the conservation issues in a manner that's good for the owner and nonthreatening to the farmer," says Townsend. "We prefer long-term leases that can adjust to the market but have a good base rent and the possibility to adjust when yields are good and the prices better than expected."

Flexible cash leases

Landowners like the upside potential, and farmers are fine with giving a little more when times are good. FSS acts as the data and lease monitoring agent for the landowner who still

controls the land. Both tenant and landowner will do better when the farm is doing well.

"We can work with any lease the landowner and farmer have set up, but we prefer cash rent with a flex payment possibility after harvest," says Townsend. "We probably have 15 different versions of leases we assist landowners and tenants with. We can help set up a lease that fits the need, but we can oversee any lease situation."

Since FSS works with data from the farmer, input suppliers, satellite imagery and other sources, "we don't have to be 'hands-on' like a farmer or the owner," says Townsend. "Yet, if there's need to be out there with boots on the ground, we can assist. We need to understand the property and farmer-owner relationship; then we can set up the open communication needed for a good farm lease arrangement."